



Mrs Christine Miller near one of the fields affected by chemical dust

'Paraquat pie' eaters surprise village

From Ronald Kershaw, Leeds

To the surprise and no doubt relief of the people of the village of Woodkirk, near Leeds, environmental health officials, a county councillor and a man from the ministry tucked into so-called paraquat pie at a public meeting on Thursday night and yesterday were fit and well at work.

The meeting was called by West Yorkshire county council, whose leader, Mr John Gunnell, was among the tasters, to convince the people of Woodkirk that toxic herbicides including paraquat released in a fire at a herbicide warehouse at Woodkirk last February was not dangerous to health in food crops. Residents who thought otherwise baked pies of rhubarb from blighted gardens and fields and invited the experts to try them.

Mr Robert Wright, Divisional Environmental health officer, said: "I suppose we

were told to put our health where our mouth was and we did". The lead was given by a Mr Tooby, a toxicologist from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The fire released "substantial quantities" of the herbicides which infected water courses throughout the village and killed fish miles away. The police are still patrolling sealed off footpaths and water courses in the area. Airborne particles have killed off vegetation in many parts of Woodkirk.

Although there is no danger to health the environmental health authorities are not satisfied about decontamination of the premises by the warehouse company, the Universal Freight Organization.

Mr Frank Reynolds, Leeds's director of environmental health, said yesterday a statutory notice had been issued under the Public

Health Act, 1969, requiring the company to damp down the area of the warehouse and dig out and remove contaminated materials.

Members of Morley and Batley Environmental Action Group, which has kept up a barrage of complaint since the fire, call Woodkirk the "toxic dustbin of West Yorkshire". They have received an assurance from Mr Gunnell that the public will in future be consulted about developments.

Mrs Christine Miller, for the committee, said: "Something good has come out of our efforts at last".

Mr Howard Sarna, a director of Universal Freight, said last night: "We have brought in new equipment which satisfies the requirements of the environmental health department. We are looking forward to quickly resolving the problem".

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From Ronald Kershaw.

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